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The Security Risk

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The reception accorded Sen. Eugene McCarthy's intervention in the Democratic primaries is another indication that the single act of a public man offensive in American politics is one of simple personal courage.

We have not seen a candidate more suspiciously treated by the very persons who ought to welcome his presence since James Meredith announced against Adam Clayton Powell. We should, in fact, be grateful to Sen. McCarthy if only because the response to his candidacy does so much to illuminate the bilious color of all our politics these days.

Sen. Wayne Morse, who would regard the President's reelection as a national disaster second only to his own defeat, announces that he will be neutral for Mr. Johnson in the Oregon primary. Prof. John Roche tells Drew Pearson that he has seen Kennedy and McCarthy with their heads together on the Senate floor; we are blessed with the first President of the United States with a faith in culture so vivid that he has elevated the duties of his major intellectual adviser to include spying on security risks.

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Sen. McCarthy's first deficiency for American liberalism is that it is impossible to see what he can be getting out of this; American liberalism has, alas, very little experience with the exercise of honor.

His second deficiency is that he doesn't have much property; imagine, as an instance, what would have happened if Sen. Robert Kennedy had undertaken this burden. There would have been a crush of volunteers to share his load, it being a journey with just enough risks to be exciting and thick enough tie-lines to be reasonably safe.

Sen. McCarthy's third deficiency is chemical. Sen. Kennedy, like Mr. Johnson, belongs to that triumphant tradition of American liberalism which, often as it cops out in practice, continues to aver that all problems can be solved if government is strong and active. Sen. McCarthy understands that, to a great degree, our worst problems

are produced by government or at least by its two most effective coordinate branches, the Defense Dept. and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

He thus has for liberals certain disturbing aspects of being a negative Senator; i. e., his chief concerns, since he has been in office, have expressed themselves in being the first Senator to be disturbed by the CIA and the first to notice that the Defense Dept. is now the leading sales agency for arms to international adventurers.

For all these reasons, he alarms even his managers a little. They are, after all, practical politicians or at least trained in that American tradition which makes any politician ashamed not to be thought practical.

In that tradition, their meeting to nominate Senator McCarthy last weekend seems to have been designed to look as much as possible like the political convention of custom, an imitation which rather oddly disturbed the candidate.

"I think it would have been done better with a little less hoopla and fewer straw hats. Just a quiet meeting where I could make my speech," he said.

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It is hard to say whether this attitude is a deficiency. Eugene McCarthy was elected to the House of Representatives three times and to the Senate twice; yet none of us can ever resist the itch to manage candidates who, in the absence of our assistance, have yet to lose an election.

There are different ways of calculating. Eugene McCarthy may do badly; and, if he does, no amount of management could alter that result; it would mean that he was just wrong in the calculation that ordinary Democratic voters do not feel as hopeless as Democratic officeholders seem to.

He should be saluted just for believing in us when no one else did. Someone said yesterday that he could understand why Sen. Kennedy was reluctant; he had so much property at stake.

"It depends," Eugene McCarthy answered, "how you want to be thought of." It's a better test than property.